UNITED
NATIONS

A

General Assembly

Distr.
GENERAL

A/CONF.157/LACRM/11
20 January 1993

ENGLISH
ORIGINAL: SPANISH

WORLD CONFERENCE ON HUMAN RIGHTS
Regional Meeting for Latin America and the Caribbean
San Jose, Costa Rica, 18-22 January 1993
Agenda item 6

COMMEMORATION OF THE INTERNATIONAL YEAR FOR THE WORLD'S INDIGENOUS PEOPLE

Letter dated 19 January 1993 from Ms. Rigoberta Menchú Tum addressed to the Chairman of the Regional Meeting

I send you my sincere greetings in the hope that the Regional Meeting is off to a rousing start.

As you probably know, my health is not very good at this time. I have had to remain a few days longer in my beloved homeland and this has affected my scheduled activities. I am therefore unable to attend this most important event to which you have so kindly extended me an invitation.

None the less, I trust that you will all display the greatest solidarity in promoting activities within the framework of the International Year for the World's Indigenous People. I also hope that indigenous peoples are represented at the World Conference on Human Rights and that their demands are heard.

Confident in your understanding and your support for the initiatives undertaken in this Year, I will close by wishing you the greatest success in the pursuit of a more just and egalitarian society.

(Signed): Rigoberta Menchú Tum
1992 Nobel Prize for Peace

ANNEX

1. Let me begin by expressing, even if it is only in writing, my tremendous satisfaction at seeing this preparatory meeting chaired by a great woman and a great friend, Elizabeth Odio Benito, with whom I have shared dramatic moments in the struggle for human rights in Geneva. I congratulate the Meeting on its choice and request her to congratulate the other officers.

2. It is an honour to be able to address this preparatory meeting, in this, the year that the most recent session of the General Assembly proclaimed the International Year for the World's Indigenous People.

3. The attainment of this International Year and the progress represented by the elaboration of the draft universal declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples are the product of the determined participation of many fellow indigenous peoples and their organizations, non-governmental organizations, the successful conduct of the work of the Working Group on Indigenous Populations, and the understanding shown by a number of States within this great Organization.

4. Our peoples will have a year dedicated to their specific problems and, to that end, they are preparing to carry out activities with the aim of translating their proposals and demands into reality through the most reasonable forms of pressure and action, with a view to contributing to the elimination of racism, oppression and exploitation.

5. The struggle of indigenous peoples to gain respect for their cultural identity, their individual and collective rights and their present and future aspirations is, on the threshold of the twenty-first century, something that is now vivid, dynamic and ever more widespread. It can no longer be denied by those who seek to perpetuate discrimination. A future filled with hope appears on the horizon for those of us who have resisted for 500 years, defending our rights; our historical memory -- verily, our survival.

6. I agree with the United Nations proposals for 1993, namely, attempting to promote cooperation among States and among governmental and non-governmental organizations in order to resolve the problems confronting indigenous peoples; increasing the participation of indigenous peoples in the planning, implementation and evaluation of the projects and policies liable to affect them; and further promoting awareness with a view to achieving respect for our cultures.

7. I feel it is necessary, however, to draw your attention to the fact that the above-mentioned proposals are in themselves limited, and this is because the pressing needs of indigenous peoples go

beyond these general proposals that would constitute the thrust of the International Year, especially when there are countries with sizeable indigenous populations that are not giving the United Nations decision the attention it deserves.

8. This situation has not made us lose our motivation to make 1993 a year in which we struggle for the rights historically denied to us, for, being social creatures, we are aware that the problems afflicting the countries of this continent and other regions of the world cannot be satisfactorily resolved without the full participation of their original peoples.

9. In our times, recognition of ethnic plurality and cultural diversity is essential in order to move humanity forward. It is urgent that the economic, social, political and cultural rights of indigenous peoples serve as the point of departure for the recognition of and respect for our deep values, such as our concept of the world and its relationship to nature.

10. I believe that the proof of the international community's respect for and acceptance of indigenous peoples must be the adoption of a universal declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples. This will be valid, however, only if it is adopted without de-emphasizing the rights that must be respected in order to end the systematic plundering suffered by indigenous peoples during the second half of this millennium now drawing to a close.

11. I hereby issue an appeal to make the human rights of indigenous peoples one of the main themes of the World Conference. The rights of these peoples are intimately bound up with respect for their economic and social rights and, in particular, the democratization and demilitarization of nations.

12. Respect for the rights of our peoples will have been achieved when we have the right to representation and genuine full political participation in State structures.

13. In conclusion, I wish to reaffirm to this gathering, as the recipient of the 1992 Nobel Prize for Peace, my commitment to champion the most noble causes of humanity, so that life may flourish in diversity and peace with social justice.